

Organic Foods and the Dirty Dozen



Eating fresh produce is the best way to obtain the nutrients that support optimum health, but the pesticides used on many crops remain a major health concern. By choosing organic foods, you reduce your exposure to potentially harmful chemicals. Pesticides present real health risks, particularly to children and those with pre-existing health problems.

What does "organic" really mean though? All food sold in the UK as organic must be produced according to

European laws on organic production. This means it comes from registered organic growers, processors and importers. However, there are a couple of concerns about the purity of organic food. Firstly, although there are less chemicals and pesticides used, there are still some that can be used as long as they are from a list certified by European and UK organisations. Although these are said to be minimal by the organisations involved, there is no easy way to find out just what has been used to grow your produce. In fact, manufacturers of organic foods are permitted to use specific non-organic ingredients provided that organic ingredients make up at least 95% of the food.

In spite of this, it is still advisable to buy organic whenever possible, as it will reduce your intake of pesticides. In addition, it is also more environmentally friendly as pesticide and herbicide use contaminates ground water, ruins soil structures and can promote erosion.

The following "Dirty Dozen" had the highest pesticide load according to scientific testing carried out over the last decade. Although the list applies to data collected in America, the reason some fruit and vegetables are worse than others is due to their skin and growing conditions, which means that the same could be said to apply to fruit and vegetables from the UK. In addition, much of our fresh fruit and vegetable produce is unfortunately imported from abroad; therefore it would be difficult to find out the processes used for individual produce. This list is generally accepted as containing produce that ideally should be bought organic:

Apples
Strawberries
Grapes
Celery

Sweet bell peppers
Nectarines
Cucumbers
Potatoes

Peaches
Spinach
Cherry tomatoes
Hot peppers

Those with the lowest pesticide load are as follows:

Onions
Pineapples
Cabbage
Asparagus
Kiwis

Sweet corn
Avocados
Sweet peas
Aubergine
Cantaloupe melons

Mushrooms
Papayas
Grapefruit
Sweet potatoes

Sources and further information: www.ewg.org and www.food.gov.uk